

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENNA 05832 01 OF 02 261528Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NRC-05 SOE-02 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 H-01 INR-10 INT-05 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-05 ICA-11 OES-07 SP-02
SS-15 STR-07 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 IO-13 CEQ-01 NEA-11
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R 261509Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6972
INFO USDOEHQ WASHDC
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 05832

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ENRG, MNUC, TECH, AU
SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOPMENTS

REF: VIENNA 5485

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. REFERENDUM ON ZWENTENDORF:
- A. HAVING FAILED TO PERSUADE THE PARLIAMENTARY
OPPOSITION TO JOIN IN ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR
STARTING UP OPERATIONS AT THE ZWENTENDORF NUCLEAR POWER
STATION, CHANCELLOR KREISKY ANNOUNCED ON JUNE 22 THAT
THE GOVERNMENT WILL SUBMIT THE DECISION TO THE PUBLIC BY
REFERENDUM. THE SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP HAD UNANIMOUSLY
APPROVED THE MOVE AND THE OPPOSITION PARTY CHIEFS
REPORTEDLY WELCOMED IT.

- B. KREISKY BASED THE MOVE ON HIS OPPOSITION TO THE
ISSUE BEING DECIDED BY THE THREE-VOTE MAJORITY THE
GOVERNMENT HOLDS IN THE PARLIAMENT. THAT MAJORITY, HOW-
EVER, WOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO PASS A PROPOSED LAW TO BE
VOTED ON BY THE PEOPLE IN A REFERENDUM NOW EXPECTED IN
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PAGE 02 VIENNA 05832 01 OF 02 261528Z

OCTOBER OR NOVEMBER. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE
REFERENDUM WILL EXPRESS THE BASIC POSITION THAT
AUSTRIA NEEDS NUCLEAR ENERGY AND WILL EMBODY A DECISION TO
START UP AT ZWENTENDORF WHEN ALL SAFEGUARDS AND LEGAL
REQUIREMENTS HAVE BEEN FULFILLED.

- C. ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE WELCOMED
THE REFERENDUM, THEY ARE ALSO ATTEMPTING TO MAKE POLITICAL

CAPITAL OUT OF IT. THE OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS HAVE TERMED KREISKY'S DECISION A CONFESSION OF HIS INABILITY TO NEGOTIATE WITH THEM ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE AND HAVE ALSO NOTED (ACCURATELY) THAT, AS RECENTLY AS JANUARY 1978, KREISKY HAD PUBLICLY OPPOSED A REFERENDUM ON NUCLEAR ENERGY BECAUSE IT WAS SUCH AN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED ISSUE. END UNCLASSIFIED.

2. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE: COMMENT: KREISKY'S DECISION IN FAVOR OF REFERENDUM WAS LARGELY POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. WHILE IT COULD LEAVE HIM OPEN TO CHARGE THAT HE IS SIDE-STEPPING A DECISION HE AND HIS PARTY SHOULD AND COULD TAKE NOW (I.E. SOME OBSERVERS FEEL THAT IF KREISKY AUTHORIZED START-UP OF ZWENTENDORF NOW, SOME 70 PERCENT OF POPULATION WOULD BE WITH HIM ON AT LEAST TWO COUNTS: (A) AVOIDING THE CONTINUING ECONOMIC DRAIN OF A NON-OPERATING INVESTMENT, AND (B) THE NEED FOR AUSTRIA TO REDUCE COSTLY ENERGY IMPORTS, THE CHANCELLOR DECIDED THAT THIS WAS THE LESSER RISK. WITHOUT BROADER BASE FOR PARLIAMENTARY ACTION THAN ITS THREE-VOTE MAJORITY, SOCIALISTS BECAME CONCERNED OVER POSSIBLE NEGATIVE FALLOUT SOCIALISTS' DECISION TO GO IT ALONE WOULD HAVE ON TWO CRUCIAL ELECTIONS WITHIN NEXT 15 MONTHS (VIENNA IN OCTOBER AND NATIONAL LEVEL ONE YEAR LATER).

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PAGE 03 VIENNA 05832 01 OF 02 261528Z

3. IN VIENNA, PEOPLE'S PARTY ALREADY HAS GOOD PROSPECT OF PICKING UP SEVERAL SEATS. CONTEST, WHICH INCLUDED NUCLEAR POLICY CONTROVERSY, COULD, SOCIALISTS FEAR, RESULT IN FURTHER WHITTILING DOWN OF ABSOLUTE SOCIALIST MAJORITY IN OCTOBER ELECTIONS. THIS PROSPECT NOW COUNTERED, SINCE REFERENDUM SCHEDULED FOR NOVEMBER 5.

4. IN ADDITION, SOCIALISTS MUST DEFEND THEIR THREE-VOTE MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN OCTOBER 1979 WHICH, UNDER THREAT OF AROUSED PUBLIC OVER NUCLEAR POWER POLICY, COULD COST THEM THEIR THIN MAJORITY. KREISKY MOVE HAS PROBABLY DIFFUSED THIS THREAT, SINCE REFERENDUM WILL TAKE PLACE LONG BEFORE NATIONAL ELECTIONS AND SINCE SOCIALISTS, BY CONTROLLING WORDING OF REFERENDUM, SHOULD BE ABLE TO GAIN COMFORTABLE MAJORITY, GIVEN ANTICIPATED SUPPORT OF MANY FROM RANK AND FILE OF OPPOSITION PARTIES.

5. IN FACT, PROBABLE COMFORTABLE MAJORITY WILL BE CITED BY SOCIALISTS AS INDICATION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR KREISKY AND HIS SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL, PROVIDING A FAVORABLE PSYCHOLOGICAL SETTING FOR

SOCIALISTS GOING INTO NATIONAL ELECTIONS. ENTIRE
EPISODE SHOWS ONCE AGAIN ABILITY OF CHANCELLOR TO
EXTRICATE HIMSELF AND PARTY AFTER HAVING SLIPPED INTO
WHAT MANY CONSIDERED A NO-WIN POLITICAL SITUATION. END
COMMENT.

6. THE STORAGE PROBLEM: IN CONNECTION WITH THE
ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE ZWENTENDORF REFERENDUM, KREISKY
IS QUOTED IN THE PRESS AS SAYING THAT HE BELIEVED ON
THE BASIS OF HIS RECENT DISCUSSIONS IN VIENNA WITH
EGYPTIAN ENERGY MINISTER ACHMED SULTAN, THE PROBLEM

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PAGE 01 VIENNA 05832 02 OF 02 261529Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 VIENNA 05832

OF PERMANENT STORAGE OF NUCLEAR WASTE COULD APPARENTLY
BE SOLVED. (SULTAN HAD EARLIER BEEN QUOTED AS SAYING
THAT EGYPT WAS PREPARED IN PRINCIPLE TO ACCEPT
AUSTRIAN WASTE. HE DID NOT MENTION WHAT EGYPT WANTED
IN RETURN). HOWEVER, DURING A MEETING YESTERDAY
BETWEEN AN EMBASSY OFFICER AND A KEY AUSTRIAN OFFICIAL
IN THE FEDERAL CHANCELLERY DEALING WITH THIS PROBLEM,
THE OFFICIAL STATED THAT, EVEN THOUGH THE COMMERCIAL
MANAGEMENT AT ZWENTENDORF AND THE TRADE MINISTRY
HAD INITIALLED A PROVISIONAL AGREEMENT, WITH EGYPT,
THE AGREEMENT COULD NOT BE ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT
BECAUSE IT VIOLATED SAFE-GUARDS CRITERIA. HE ALSO
RESTATED THE VIEW HE HAS GIVEN US BEFORE THAT THE
EGYPTIAN PRICE WAS SIMPLY TOO HIGH FOR AUSTRIA. IT
WAS NOT CLEAR WHETHER HE KNEW ABOUT THE KREISKY DECISION

ON A REFERENDUM AND KREISKY'S REMARKS ABOUT STORAGE IN EGYPT BUT THE SOURCE COMMENTED IRONICALLY ON KREISKY'S PROPENSITY FOR GOING IT ALONE. AT THE SAME TIME SOURCE CONFIRMED THAT AUSTRIA WILL CONTINUE TO TALK ABOUT STORAGE WITH OTHER COUNTRIES UNTIL IT IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 VIENNA 05832 02 OF 02 261529Z

DECIDED WHETHER THE U.S. WILL STORE SPENT FUEL OR WHETHER AUSTRIA WILL REPROCESS AT COGEMA.

7. U.S.-AUSTRIAN BILATERALS: SOURCE CONFIRMED THAT THE JUNE 13, INFORMAL U.S. AUSTRIAN TALKS HERE (REFTEL) GREATLY CLARIFIED U.S. POSITION ON STORAGE AND REPROCESSING. AUSTRIANS ARE STILL MOST ANXIOUS FOR AN EARLY U.S. COMMITMENT TO ACCEPT AUSTRIAN SPENT FUEL. IF AND WHEN IT COMES, AUSTRIA WILL USE ONLY A ONCE-THROUGH CYCLE. SOURCE ALSO RESTATED IN SOME DETAIL AUSTRIAN POSITION THAT IRRETRIEVABLE WASTE IS "POST SAFEGUARDS" AND NOT SUBJECT TO U.S. CONTROLS. END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. BORG

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